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INTERVENE TO PREVENT GENOCIDE

The Australian Council for Overseas Aid has today called for the UN Security Council to urgently agree to authorise an international intervention force in East Timor to prevent genocide.

Executive Director, Janet Hunt, said 'The Indonesian Government has no control of the security situation, and indeed Indonesian troops are implicated in the terror.'

Ms Hunt said, 'Under international law there is a right of humanitarian intervention. That right must now be exercised by Australia and other nations urgently. Every day that goes by puts more Timorese at extreme risk. The international community has raised the hopes of the Timorese people by conducting the ballot. It must not let them down now.'

'Australia in particular must not let the Timorese people down a second time - an intervention force is necessary before thousands of Timorese are killed by militia or die through lack of food and water.'

Ms Hunt said 'This is an extraordinarily grave situation - Australia must not stand by and witness a genocide on its doorstep.'

The Australian Government must now pull out all stops. It should immediately:

- retract its recognition of Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor
- halt all military cooperation and sales; and
- suspend economic aid.

Ms Hunt called on the US, UK and other governments to join Australia in the strongest possible action to persuade the Indonesian Government to authorise an international force into East Timor to restore law and order, and to enable humanitarian agencies to reach people in extreme need.

'In the event such Indonesian Government agreement is not reached, international action remains possible under international law, and should proceed,' Ms Hunt said.

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